CITY STAFF REPAIRS
FLORENTINE FOUNTAIN

by Don Hall
photos by Don Hall

The Florentine fountain works! Water starts from a nozzle at the top, splashes down over a water vessel held aloft by a draped woman, and then rains into a scalloped pan, which overflows into a second, larger bowl, where eight lion heads spout the water from their mouths into the large pool surrounding the fountain. From here it flows out a drain, through a sand filter, to a continuous pump which shoots the water back to the top of the fountain to begin its decorative, downward plunge again, making a wonderful, wet sound as it does.

Looking toward the cemetery entrance, the fountain is seen both in shadow and light. The cast-iron Florentine Fountain is currently painted a dark green.

Restoration of the fountain was a major do-it-yourself job. Rather than employing outsiders to get it running again, cemetery manager Carmen Russo decided that a City of Rochester pipe fitter, Mervin Parker, Jr., and three maintenance mechanics, Leroy Pard, Jerry Caruso, and Edward Cardwell, along with maintenance electrician, Mark Julian, with help from Mt. Hope Cemetery staff member Richard Miller and cemetery operations supervisor, Jeffery Simmons, could do the job. In addition to their skills, they needed a "sky hook", a crane lift bucket that could elevate a person to the top of the fountain to install a new nozzle.

The electricity to run the pump comes underground from the 1874 gatehouse. Both the pump and the timer were frozen, and new ones were installed. In addition, the water line up through the center of the fountain needed to be replaced with new copper. Members of the crew also painted the interior of the surrounding pool with a special paint that was mixed from two parts that hardened into a super strong, waterproof lining.

The fountain underscores the Victorian notion of romantic cemetery design. The concept of a rural cemetery, as the style is called, was pioneered in 1831 by the famous Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The second such rural cemetery is the 1836 Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, but Mount Hope is the first municipal rural cemetery. The two earlier rural cemeteries were not owned by the cities in which they were located; they were private operations. Mount Hope's Disney-like topography lent itself beautifully to becoming a rural cemetery, with the winding roads, Moorish gazebo, and Florentine fountain adding to the romantic atmosphere.

The fountain is made of cast iron. It stands 24 feet high, weighs 14 tons and was installed in 1875. It may well be the only working public fountain in Rochester.

This writer is not sure why it's called a Florentine fountain. It doesn't particularly resemble famous fountains in Florence, such as those in the Boboli Gardens, the Pitti Palace, or the central Neptune Fountain. Maybe this is like trying to find French toast in Paris, or an English muffin in London. No matter why it's named "Florentine", it makes a wonderful addition to the cemetery.
The last time a major restoration of the fountain occurred was in 1985 when the president of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery, John Clark III, presented a gift of $25,000 to restore the badly deteriorated cast iron fountain. Clark’s gift was matched by the city of Rochester, and the combined amount permitted a complete restoration of the fountain, which was disassembled and the parts shipped to the Architectural Iron Company of Milford, Pennsylvania. There, 22 layers of paint were removed from existing parts that were sufficiently preserved to be used to make molds for recasting. New iron parts were cast by foundry staff using those good parts of the fountain to make molds, or by creating new pieces using photographs taken when the fountain was new.

The fountain is surrounded by a garden, which Friends trustee, John Pearsall, designed and maintains. During the recent work on the fountain, Pearsall took some of the plantings from the fountain garden to his garden home, where he “heeled them in” until the work was finished around the fountain and the plants could be replaced.

The fountain runs from 8 a.m. to dusk, seven days a week through late autumn, when it will be turned off for the winter. But next spring, the pump will whir again, and the waters begin their plunge earthward.

(Historic event in Mount Hope: Record Crowd attends Artists Tour by Richard Reisen)

At 10 a.m. on Saturday, August 26, Eric Logan and I presented a tour of artists’ gravesites and sculptural works in Mount Hope Cemetery. We expected perhaps 20 to 30 people, but because of excellent publicity created by trustee Jan Wyland and a beautiful day, over 200 people arrived for the tour. It was the largest tour group that the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery have ever experienced in our 26 years of giving tours, and it raised the challenge of communicating with such a large assemblage without the benefit of electronic amplification.

Projecting our voices, we managed to communicate to the entire crowd for a two-hour tour that visited about 20 interesting sites. In the walk-around, we admired two sculptures from the 1870s by the distinguished Italian artist, Nicola Cantalamessa-Papotti, who was sculptor to the King of Italy, the Vatican, and European royalty, and who created memorials for American presidents. His large, marble sculptures in Mount Hope are the Weary Pilgrim and St. John, the Divine.

The group also admired the works of Fletcher Steele, a famous...
landscape architect with an artistic flair for cemetery monuments, including his own and family monuments with 18th-century motifs carved into distinguished black slate. Steele's penchant for black is also evident in the monument he designed for Frank and Caroline Gannett—Frank being the founder of the Gannett newspaper chain. The expansive Gannett monument incorporates a huge granite endless knot set in a field of volcanic glass, called obsidian, which is very, very black.

Tiffany Studios in New York City designed this massive Art Deco monument in 1927.

The famous landscape architect, Fletcher Steele, designed the Gannett monument.
Another interesting site on the tour was the bronze bas relief sculpture on George Parson's polished black granite tombstone by Rochester's living sculptor, Robert Marx. Another special site was the massive granite Art Deco sculpture created by Tiffany Studios in 1927 for the shoe magnate, Wilbur Coon. Two recent artistic tombstones for two different kinds of artists were a replica of "Showboat" carved in granite on the monument of the great baritone, William Warfield.

**VAN VECHTEN FAMILY TOUCHSTONES**

**(A Genealogical Record From the 1500s to the Present)**

by Ashley Shepard Van Vechten

photos by Frank A. Gillespie

While wandering through Mount Hope Cemetery, I found it difficult to comprehend the sheer number of people whose lives are represented by all of the gravestones. Their smiles, thoughts, triumphs, and pains have all been replaced by cold stone markers. Even more difficult to grasp is the number of people—loved ones, parents, uncles, aunts, children, siblings, friends—who rest in Mount Hope. I, too, found part of my family in Mount Hope, and thus began my personal genealogical search.

**The Dutch Van Vechtens.**

My dad's side of the family, the Van Vechtens, originated from the Netherlands. The town of Vecht stands roughly 24 1/2 miles southeast of Amsterdam, near the river Vecht. The town itself holds some remarkable history that dates back to the time of Caesar. It was founded as a Roman camp because of its strategic location near the Rhine River. Vecht, or as it was first called, Vecum, translates to "a place of fighting." The name Vecht then refers to fighting or fighters. The early inhabitants of Vechten certainly took after their name. In 1572, the people of Vechten rebelled against Spanish rule alongside their fellow Hollanders. They participated in the defense of Haarlem from Don Frederick and his troops. Locals from Vechten also fought at the horrific siege of Leyden in the following year in 1573. During the course of the battle, the combatants were cut off from their desperately needed supply lines. It has been recorded that although "half of the citizens were lost by starvation and pestilence, . . . when the demand was made to surrender and open their gates, the reply was: 'We are short of provisions, but after we have eaten our left arms, we will still fight you with our right. Surrender! Never!''"

The fighting spirit was clearly evident in the citizens of Vechten and is also apparent within our family, the descendants of those townspeople. Our family coat of arms bears a "fesse," which represents a "military belt of honor conferred by the monarch for some special deed of valor, and the battlements show it to have been given in defense of an attack on a fortress of great strength."

**Sailing to America.**

In the year of 1638, Teunis Dircksen Van Vechten, with his wife and their small child, sailed from Holland aboard the Arms of Norway and landed in America. They settled on a farm in Greenbush, New York, on the east side of the Hudson River just south of Albany. I am a direct descendant of Teunis Dircksen Van Vechten, one of the earliest settlers of Rensselaerswyck colony. Teuns' third son, Gerrit Teunis Van Vechten moved south in 1678 and purchased Captain Jan Clute's lands in Catskill, New York. Once there, Gerrit also purchased several slaves and began a farm of his own. Gerrit and his wife Antjie Janse had one son, Johannes. He married Maria Bogardus on March 19, 1699. On February 13, 1713, their son Derrick was born. He married Catherine Knickerbocker, and together they had just one son. Derrick Van Vechten took an active interest within his community, and with Colonel John Knickerbocker, his father-in-law, helped the colonists during the French and Indian War of 1746. According to family legend, "While at home on a furlough he caught an Indian stealing from his cellars. Derrick was a large, powerful man and gave the Indian a good drubbing. A few days after, he was in his cell near his home and was shot and scalped by, it is supposed, the same Indian. He was literally chopped into pieces with a tomahawk; so the pieces of his body were picked up in a corn basket and taken in a canoe down the river to be buried either at Fort Edward or Albany."
remained, convinced of their relative safety from British troops. One such colonist was a young woman by the name of Jane McCrea. Her fiancé, a Tory with General Burgoyne's army, urged her to stay in the area until his arrival. On July 17, 1777, Jane McCrea was captured by Native American scouts, supposedly in the employ of General Burgoyne. She was brutally beaten, shot, and scalped. This compelling case of an innocent young woman slaughtered triggered an anti-Native American outburst within pro-revolution colonists and soldiers.

On August 8, 1777, at the height of anti-Indian sentiments, Major Van Vechten was on a scouting party when he was ambushed by Native Americans. A shot was fired at Derrick; however it passed through his tobacco box. He was not immediately killed but was eventually scalped by the attacking Indians. The July 21, 1882 issue of the Troy Telegrarn reported that "the bones of Lieut. Van Vechten were accidentally exhumed at Fort Edward yesterday... Lieut. Van Vechten was a soldier in the revolution and was killed while in pursuit of the party who murdered Jane McCrea. He was buried on the brow of the hill, near the spot where he fell."

Derrick Van Vechten's son Walter was born on June 2, 1767 and settled in Hoosic, New York. Walter was appointed ensign in Colonel John W. Grossbeck's regiment by Governor George Clinton. The office of ensign was responsible for drilling new recruits, as well as creating and forming companies and regiments. Walter's wife, Jane Fonda, gave birth to their son Isaac on December 20, 1794. Isaac married Rebecka Gordon and together they lived in Buskirk Bridge, New York. Their son, John G. Van Vechten was born on July 18, 1818.

A Train Accident on the NYCRR.

John Van Vechten was a conductor and baggage man for the New York Central Railroad. On April 12, 1856, John was involved in a train accident. According to the Rochester Democratic Union, the train that left Syracuse bound for Rochester was thrown from the tracks several miles west of Geneva. Conductor Van Vechten was in the first car thrown off the tracks, however he received only some minor bruises on his head. John was extremely lucky to have escaped this incident with hardly any scratches. Four years prior to the incident, in 1852, John married Charlotte A. Wells Day of Ogden, just west of Rochester in Monroe County, New York. Their children were Ida R. Van Vechten, my great-great-aunt, and Frank A. Van Vechten, my great-great-grandfather. Frank Van Vechten married Clara L. Collins on June 9, 1880 and became the parents of Ida May Van Vechten, my great-aunt and Frederick Eugene Van Vechten, my great-grandfather.

Rochester Touchstones.

One of the main reasons I decided to take this class (Religion 167, Speaking Stones, at the University of Rochester) was so that I would have the opportunity to research my family's origins, not only in early America, but also right here in Rochester. Throughout the years at family gatherings, I would hear of several family burial plots that were owned by Van Vechtens in Mount Hope Cemetery, and I wondered who of my relatives could possibly be buried in them. For me, their lives did not seem to be congruent with my own. I did not know these ancestors; I would never meet them. I would never hear the inflections in their laughter, never smell their cologne, never see the wrinkles in their smiles or watch the light change the color of their eyes. They seemed as dead to me as if they had never once existed. I could not tell them about myself or my stories. However, as I have now learned, they could tell me their stories if only I would listen.

My grandfather has in his possession railroad conductor John G. Van Vechten's gas lamp, which he would wave from the train to signal its arrival or departure. This is my grandfather's touchstone, his connection to our shared past. My touchstones lie within Mount Hope Cemetery itself. The graves of Frank Van Vechten, his wife Clara, his daughter Ida May, his sister Ida R. and her husband David Rudman are all located in the same plot in the cemetery. They lie in Section C, Lot 166, off Linden and Maple avenues.

According to cemetery records, the 400-square-foot lot was purchased by Maria S. Jeffrey on September 8, 1873 for $200. It is assumed that one of my relatives purchased half of this plot from Ms Jeffrey in a private transaction. David and Ida Rudman's gravestone is stark in aesthetic appeal. It is rectangular in shape; however the top is shaped like the headboard of a bed, symbolizing eternal rest. The marker sits atop a stone base that is roughly cut on all four sides. The granite monument is also cut roughly on the two flanking sides and displays the surname Rudman across the top in capital letters, followed by David C. Rudman's name. Below his name is carved the year of his birth and death with a dash separating the two. Underneath this is carved Ida R. Van Vechten, accompanied by the phrase, "HIS WIFE" beneath her name. Below this, Ida R.'s year of birth and death are also carved into the stone.

Ida R. Van Vechten, my great-great-
aunt, was the first child of John G. Van Vechten and Charlotte A. Wells Day Van Vechten. Ida R. was born on February 16, 1854. Until she was of marrying age, she resided with her parents at their home on 21 Hudson Street, off North Chestnut Street, just north of the Inner Loop. She met David C. Rudman, and they married on September 21, 1875. The couple moved to the Rochester suburb of Irondequoit where David lived after emigrating from England. David worked as a market gardener to support his family. In 1877, their first child, David, was born followed by two daughters. In 1919, David senior died from “softening of the brain,” which most likely was caused by a stroke or brain hemorrhage. Ida was left to take care of her children alone. In 1948, Ida Rudman, assuming that the R. stands for Rudman, perhaps because she is buried in the Van Vechten plot, Ida wanted to show her relation to her brother, Frank Van Vechten.

Frank and Clara Van Vechten’s gravestone is also a fairly plain marker. The stone sits upon a granite base which is purposely cut roughly on all four sides. On the back of the stone, in the roughly cut face, is carved a smooth strip of stone that bears the surname Van Vechten. The gravestone itself is rectangular in shape, with the family name Van Vechten engraved in capital letters across the top of the front face of the stone. Beneath this, is engraved Frank A. and the years in which he was born and died, 1856 and 1934 respectively. The years are separated by a single dash to indicate the timeline of his life. Clara L. Collins is engraved beneath Frank’s name, along with the phrase “HIS WIFE” underneath. Using the same style of her husband, Clara’s birth and death years are etched under her name.

Frank A. Van Vechten was born on May 25, 1856 in Rochester, New York. He lived with his parents, John G. and Charlotte Van Vechten, at their home on Hudson Street, along with his older sister, Ida. Frank became a letter carrier for the U.S. post office, a job he held for over 35 years. He met Clara L. Collins, a young woman whose father had emigrated from England and whose mother was from New York City. They married on June 9, 1880. Clara bore three children, only two of whom survived. The third child that did not survive is not buried in the family plot. Their first child, Ida May Van Vechten, was born on April 15, 1881. Their only son and my great-grandfather, Frederick Eugene Van Vechten, was born on April 2, 1886. The family lived at 27 Harlem Street, off Goodman Street in the city of Rochester. Charlotte A. Wells Day, Frank’s mother, also lived with the family after her husband, John G., died. She lived with the family until her 87th year when she became ill and died several weeks later. Frank Van Vechten was an avid churchgoer and belonged to the Memorial Presbyterian Church on Merchants Avenue for over 50 years. At church, Frank served as a trustee, treasurer, and church elder.

On October 4, 1912, at the age of 31 years, Ida Van Vechten died. She never married and lived all of her life with her parents at 27 Harlem Street. Ida died of pernicious anaemia, owing to the fact that she must have been anemic. She was interred in Mount Hope Cemetery three days after her untimely death. Her gravestone differs slightly from that of her parents. It is a rectangular shaped granite stone and sits atop a granite base. The two flanking sides of the stone are roughly cut, just like her parents’ stone. The face of the gravestone appears different, however. Inside a rectangular-shaped box with its edges rounded inward, is Ida May Van Vechten’s name. Underneath this are her years of birth and death. On the top of the stone, there is raised lettering proclaiming “DAUGHTER.” I assume that Frank and Clara designed their daughter’s gravestone, considering this carving on the top.

Fifteen years later, on September 13, 1927, Clara L. Van Vechten died from cirrhosis of the liver. She was cremated and the whereabouts of her ashes is unknown. Frank Van Vechten outlived both his wife and daughter. He chose to embrace life and remainery rather than remain a widow. Frank wed Hepzibah Danforth Farber on November 14, 1928. Their marriage lasted only six years; Frank died on May 23, 1934, two days before his 78th birthday. He died of cancer.

Touchstones in the 20th Century.

Frank and Clara’s other child, Frederick Eugene Van Vechten, is my great-grandfather. He is buried with his wife's family in another plot in Mount Hope Cemetery. The plot is located in Range 8, Lot 234, off Wilson Drive in the cemetery. The plot contains four gravestones marking the graves of Samuel J. LeFevre, Charlotte Shepard LeFevre, Frederick E. Van Vechten, and Ada Shepard Van Vechten. My middle name is Shepard and this uncommon moniker originates from Isaac B. Shepard, my great-great-grandfather. Isaac was a farmer who lived in Pittsford, New York, now a suburb of Rochester. He married Hepzibah Danforth Farber on November 14, 1928. Their mixture years; up in Pittsford, New York.

Heacock of Fulton, New York, and they settled in Pittsford. They had three children, Ada Ward Shepard, Charlotte Shepard, and Ralph Shepard. Ada is my great-grandmother and her sister, Charlotte, is the one who purchased the cemetery plot.

My great aunt Charlotte (Lottie) Shepard LeFevre was born in 1881 and grew up in Pittsford, New York. She married Samuel LeFevre, who was born on August 10, 1880. Together they resided at 151 Hazelwood Terrace, in the northeast part of the city.
Samuel registered for the World War draft in 1917; however, he was not sent to Europe. He died in 1927 of pneumonia. It was then that Charlotte purchased the plot. Samuel's gravestone is made of granite and sits on a base. The back and sides of the gravestone are purposely rough cut, giving the stone a naturalistic appearance. On the back, the surname LeFevre is carved into the stone. The front of the stone contains a rectangular border, with two unidentifiable flowers in each upper corner. An Old English style letter L is carved into the top of the stone. Underneath the L is Samuel J. LeFevre, below which are his birth and death years.

In 1971, after 54 years as a widow, Charlotte LeFevre died. She died of cerebral thrombosis at age 89 years. Her gravestone is identical to that of her husband's. Her name, Charlotte Shepard LeFevre is carved under the L, along with her birth and death dates. When purchasing the plot, however, Charlotte made sure to leave room for herself, her sister Ada, and her sister's husband, Frederick Eugene Van Vechten.

A Grandfather at the University of Rochester.

Frederick Eugene Van Vechten, my great-grandfather, was born on April 2, 1886 and lived with his family at their residence at 27 Harlem Street. Fred, as he liked to be called, attended public school at East High School on Main Street East. Fred then attended the University of Rochester, enrolling in the class of 1909 as a liberal arts major. This was approximately 30 years before the advent of the River Campus and the university as we know it today. The campus was a cluster of several buildings on Prince Street/University Avenue closer to downtown Rochester. At this time, women were just beginning to gain a place in the world of academia, and despite many protests from the young men in Rochester, women were admitted to the university. In my grandfather's graduating class, there were 20 women.

Fred was involved in many clubs and organizations at the University of Rochester. He belonged to the social fraternity, Delta Upsilon, which is still a strong presence at the university on the Fraternity Quad. He also wrote for the Interprets Yearbook as an associate athletic editor. Fred was class orator, Sophomore Joll, a delegate to the Northfield Student Conference, and took part in the Greek Play. According to the 1909 Interprets Yearbook, Fred was "of an inventive turn of mind." He also gave a speech entitled College Politics at the 1909 Sophomore Banquet. Other speeches at the banquet included The Ideal Girl and Undergraduate Pranks of Past Years. From this, one can deduce that Fred was undoubtedly serious in his studies and activities.

Despite his serious attitude at the university, Fred dropped out of school just before his senior year in 1909. He began working at the Merchants Bank in downtown Rochester on the corner of Main Street and South Avenue. At the bank, Fred worked as a note teller. It was during this time period that he met Ada Ward Shepard, Isaac B. and Jessie Shepard's daughter. Ada was born on April 2, 1887, exactly one year after Fred's birth. They married on September 12, 1911. Fred and Ada had three children; Robert S. came first, then daughter Lois V., and finally their youngest, Donald C., my grandfather. Donald Charles Van Vechten obtained his middle name from one of Fred's friends at the bank, who worked as a teller in the next booth. The family lived in a house on 66 Crawford Street, near Highland Park. After Donald was born, they moved to 421 Mount Vernon Avenue, even closer to Highland Park and just down the street from Highland Hospital.

With Fred working at the Merchants Bank, the family lived in relative prosperity. Things changed, however, in 1929 with the stock market crash. The Merchants Bank closed, and Fred found himself out of work and in the unemployment lines. Fortunately for the Van Vectens, this unemployment lasted only three years. In 1932, the State Bank of Hilton opened in Hilton, New York, roughly 13 miles northwest of the city. Fred managed to obtain a position there, and the family moved to 193 West Avenue in Hilton, New York. Fred lived out most of his working years in Hilton and eventually became bank president. He retired from the bank in February 1959.

In his later years, Fred was involved in the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, and Central Presbyterian Church. He also was a volunteer at the Hearing and Speech Center. Due to his business-oriented background, Fred kept extensive records of every penny he earned. Each year, Fred would calculate his earnings, 10 percent of which he donated to various charities and benevolent organizations. After his retirement, he and Ada purchased a mobile home and hit the open road, traveling and touring all across America. "Motor-homing" or "RVing" was a very new pastime in the 1950s, so Fred spoke at Rotary and City club meetings in Rochester about his brand new hobby. As he and his wife became older, however, "motor-homing" was no longer a possibility.

In 1972, Ada Van Vechten died from arteriosclerosis. Fred died nine years later in 1981 of respiratory unrest at the age of 95 years. Their gravestones lie next to those of Charlotte and Samuel LeFevre in Range 8, Lot 234. They have plain markers of granite that are low to the ground. The stones are roughly cut on all sides except the front face. There is a rectangular outline on the front of each stone with a convex curve along the top of the stone. This curve is reminiscent of the headboard of a bed, symbolizing eternal rest. The positions of their graves suggests that Fred and Ada are at eternal rest, side by side in their earthly bed. Engraved on their stones are their names under which their respective birth and death dates appear.

The first time I visited their graves was this year, 2006. Recognition and realization poured into me and flowed into my eyes as I saw them lying there. In each stone, I could visualize their lives and my whole family: cousins, uncles, aunts, parents, and grandparents. I have Fred's old yearbooks from the University of Rochester, his journals, his account records, pictures of him smiling. Now, he was a stone at my feet. It never felt like a more perfect time to cry. Instead, I reached down and traced my last name with my warm fingers. Like my grandfather's lamp, I, too, have touchstones, visible markers to indicate what has come before. My touchstones stand in two neat rows, seven stones in Mount Hope Cemetery that mark the lives and deaths of my relatives. These stones bear witness to the existence of several generations of people, my family. I, too, am a touchstone. My existence is proof of the lives that they had, the people they loved, and, with their lives, the history they created.

(Editor's Note: Ashley Van Vechten is a student at the University of Rochester and prepared this thoughtful, personal genealogical study of her family as part of the course work in Religion 167, Speaking Stones, taught by Professor Emil Homrin, who is also a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery.)
The gatehouse at 791 Mount Hope Avenue, stands inside the north entrance gates to Mount Hope Cemetery. It was built in 1874 and designed in High Victorian Gothic style by the prominent Rochester architect, Andrew J. Warner. One of the wonderful decorative features that Warner placed in the gatehouse was five stained-glass windows, each one displaying a bucolic natural landscape scene befitting a rural cemetery like Mount Hope. Here is one of those windows depicting a house in the country beside a creek and bridge with a lake and hills in the distance. The photo was taken in full color by city photographer, Ira Srole, and is reproduced here in black-and-white. The windows are very high on the wall and required a special tall stepladder that had to be secured by two men while Ira Srole climbed up to approach the stained-glass windows at their level.